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The CIA's New Cover

The Rope Dancer
by Victor Marchetti.

Grosset & Dunlap, 361 pp., \$6.95

Richard J. Barnet

I

In late November the Central Intelligence Agency conducted a series of "senior seminars" so that some of its important bureaucrats could consider its public image. I was invited to attend one session and to give my views on the proper role of the Agency. I suggested that its legitimate activities were limited to studying newspapers and published statistics, listening to the radio, thinking about the world, interpreting data of reconnaissance satellites, and occasionally

publishing the names of foreign spies. I had been led by conversations with a number of CIA officials to believe that they were thinking along the same lines. One CIA man after another eagerly joined the discussion to assure me that the days of the flamboyant covert operations were over. The upper-class amateurs of the OSS who stayed to mastermind operations in Guatemala, Iran, the Congo, and elsewhere—Allen Dulles, Kermit Roosevelt, Richard Bissell, Tracy Barnes, Robert Amory, Desmond Fitzgerald—had died or departed.

In their place, I was assured, was a small army of professionals devoted to preparing intelligence "estimates" for the President and collecting information the clean, modern way, mostly with sensors, computers, and sophisticated reconnaissance devices. Even Gary Powers, the U-2 pilot, would now be as much a museum piece as Mata Hari. (There are about 18,000 employees in the CIA and 200,000 in the entire "intelligence community" itself. The cost of maintaining them is somewhere between \$5 billion and \$6 billion annually. The employment figures do not include foreign agents or mercenaries, such as the CIA's 100,000-man hired army in Laos.)

A week after my visit to the "senior seminar" *Newsweek* ran a long story on "the new espionage" with a picture of CIA Director Richard Helms on the cover. The reporters clearly had spoken to some of the same people I had. As *Newsweek* said, "The gaudy era of the

adventurer has passed in the American spy business; the bureaucratic age of Richard C. Helms and his gray specialists has settled in." I began to have an uneasy feeling that *Newsweek's* article was a cover story in more than one sense.

It has always been difficult to analyze organizations that engage in false advertising about themselves. Part of the responsibility of the CIA is to spread confusion about its own work. The world of Richard Helms and his "specialists" does indeed differ from that of Allen Dulles. Intelligence organizations, in spite of their predilection for what English judges used to call "frolics of their own," are servants of policy. When policy changes, they must eventually change too, although because of the atmosphere of secrecy and deception in which they operate, such changes are exceptionally hard to control. To understand the "new Age espionage" one must see it as part of the Nixon Doctrine which, in essence, is a global strategy for maintaining US power and influence without overtly involving the nation in another ground war.

But we cannot comprehend recent developments in the "intelligence community" without understanding what Mr. Helms and his employees actually do. In a speech before the National Press Club, the director discouraged journalists from making the attempt. "You've just got to trust us. We are honorable men." The same speech is made each year to the small but growing number of senators who want a closer check on the CIA. In asking, on November 10, for a "Select Committee on the Coordination of United States Activities Abroad to oversee activities of the Central Intelligence Agency," Senator Stuart Symington noted that "the subcommittee having oversight of the Central Intelligence Agency has not met once this year."

Symington, a former Secretary of the Air Force and veteran member of the Armed Services Committee, has also said that "there is no federal agency in our government whose activities receive less scrutiny and control than the CIA." Moreover, soon after

Symington spoke, Senator Allen J.



STATO THR

Laos Secrets

According to a subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the CIA has carved out its own military satrapy in Laos. A 23-page staff report released August 3 says that the agency maintains a force of 30,000 irregulars and recruits many of these soldiers from Thailand. These irregulars are "the main cutting edge" of the decrepit Royal Laotian Army - that is to say, the Vientiane regime has almost given up, and the rest of the army won't fight at all. "The Royal Lao Government continues to be almost totally dependent on the US, perhaps more dependent than any other government in the world." Washington in turn has become almost totally dependent on hired Asian professionals, some 4500 of whom were lifted out of Thai commands at annual salaries of \$7000.

This partial audit of the administration's Laos budget put our current expenses there at \$284.2 million and credited about \$70 million to the CIA. Mr. Symington, the subcommittee chairman, told a closed session of the Senate on June 7 that the cost overruns for the 1970 program came to \$72 million. "Before the fiscal year 1972 even begins," he warned, "plans are being made to spend more than twice the amount being requested of Congress by the executive branch." The government will be spending \$374 million, at least eight times the amount that Vientiane will spend to defend itself. But even this does not include the secret funds paid out for Thai troops and the Pentagon air war. All that would add \$400 million more.

The new report makes one wonder how Congress lost track of our multiple wars in Indochina. Part of the blame is Mr. Nixon's, whose major statement on Laos in March 1970 omitted mention of massive B-52 raids in northern Laos begun only a month before. A year later, when the cost overruns started to show up, the Senate dispatched its own team of investigators to Laos. They found that the Pentagon had intrigued against congressional restrictions attached to the 1970-71 Defense appropriations bill, which prohibited the Department of Defense from financing Thai soldiers for Laos duty. There was to be no money for mer-

cenaries, Congress thought it had said. But somehow in the undergrowth of Pentagon flow charts and budget pipelines, the administration found the necessary ways and means. First, it spent more money than ever through the CIA. Then, under CIA auspices, it spent the Pentagon money that had already been appropriated, technically avoiding the bans laid on the Defense Department. "By a process of osmosis," Mr. Fulbright complained in the Senate, "the CIA has become another Defense Department, and furthermore, a Defense Department that we cannot restrict."

During five weeks of negotiations with the Symington subcommittee, the administration did its best to sanitize the Laos study. Here is the first official public document even to mention the CIA in any connection with Laos, though the actual expenditures of the CIA were finally stricken from the record. It is clear from the report that the executive branch can use the CIA as an agency of last resort to make nonsense out of congressional oversight.

CHATTANOOGA, TENN.

TIMES

AUG 20 1971

M - 59,391

S - 69,238

Where Gaps Appear

On Jan. 27, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman J. W. Fulbright wrote Defense Secretary Melvin Laird a series of questions about military operations on Laos. On April 14, the department said the information was "too highly sensitive to release."

On June 7, the Senate held a closed session during which it was briefed on the Laos situation from a Foreign Relations Committee staff report. On Aug. 3, a censored version of the session's proceedings was published in the *Congressional Record*.

One of the things revealed was that the CIA was supervising and paying for training of Thai irregulars who "volunteer" for duty in Laos, transport them into Laos, and return them when their tour is up. But the State Department, in answer to a query, said that since the soldiers are volunteers and serve under command of the Royal Lao government,

they "are considered to be local forces in Laos."

Back of all this is a clause in the 1971 Defense Department Appropriation bill: "Nothing . . . hereunder shall be construed as authorizing the use of any such funds to support Vietnamese or other free world forces in actions designed to provide military support and assistance to the governments of Cambodia and Laos."

And who spoke of the "credibility gap" under President Johnson?

Target Guides Reported

Aiding Current Laos Drive

STATOTHR

By D. E. Ronk

Special to The Washington Post

VIENTIANE, Aug. 13—Forward air guides are "doing a fine job" of assisting the current Royal Laotian government drive to recapture large areas of Laos lost to Communist forces during the dry seasons of 1970 and 1971, U.S. government spokesmen say.

Forward air guides are specially selected soldiers who control U.S. and Laotian bombers from the ground, guiding them in on targets. The existence of the guides was divulged last week by the Senate subcommittee on United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, headed by Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.).

According to the committee's report, there are 182 such guides, 53 from the Royal Lao army and 129 from CIA-supported irregular forces in Laos, most of whom are Thai nationals and veterans of the Vietnam war, according to sources in Laos.

Sources say the guides are carefully selected on the basis of intelligence, experience and either ability to speak English or ability to learn it easily and well, then thoroughly trained. All are officers or senior non-commissioned officers.

Functioning like guerrillas, they infiltrate within sight of enemy troops or installations and direct either bombing or artillery fire onto the target, moving on after bombardment is completed.

According to the guides, their orders to propeller-driven T-28 bombers are relayed through forward air controllers flying overhead. Orders to U.S. Air Force jet pilots are usually given directly because of the speed of the bombing runs, hence the English language requirement.

Use of the forward air guides in guerrilla operations raises the questions here of further departure from the rules of engagement procedures established by the U.S. government to protect nonmilitary targets, procedures including prior clearance of targets by the U.S. ambassador in Vientiane.

Royalist T-28 bombers are already exempted from the rules as are U.S. bombing missions supporting infiltrating or exfiltrating troops, exemptions creating a "loophole" in the rules, according to the subcommittee report.

Doubt that the rules can retain even their limited success in protecting nonmilitary targets if guides are allowed to target bombers is expressed by many observers here, although the presence of a guide would appear to strengthen the system.

A measure of the successes being enjoyed by Royalist troops in their current offensive thrust in both northern and southern Laos is attributable to use of the guides working with air and artillery support, according to spokesmen. In northern Laos, irregular troops under command of Gen. Vang Pao at Long Cheng control most of the Plain of Jars, according to official spokesmen, while other sources say the irregulars have captured the entire plain, including Khang Khai and Phonsovanh in the northeast corner.

Intelligence reports through U.S. government spokesmen say that the high ground at the northeast corner of the plain is still held by a convention of Communist troops, however, blocking movement along routes leading toward Dienbienphu in North Vietnam.

Forward air guides are said

to have played an important role in Vang Pao's movement back onto the plain.

In southern Laos, Royal Laotian government troops continue a slow, careful thrust toward Paksong on the Bolovens plateau east of Pakse under cover of bombing and artillery, much of it controlled by the guides.

Paksong, informed sources say, is expected to be captured by Royalist troops within the next few days.

Thirty-five miles east of Savannakhet and 120 miles north of Pakse, a third thrust has stalled about the town of Moung Phalane after encountering stiff enemy resistance, according to the government sources. Air guides are believed to be operating with guerrilla troops beyond Moung Phalane, although the town itself has not been occupied.

Considerable complaint has been expressed in months both by Laotians and by U.S. mission sources working in northern Laos over indiscriminate bombing in particular by Lao planes—which, according to U.S. mission sources, get their bombing sorties over with quickly to earn extra pay. As the report says, pilots in at least two of Laos' five military regions receive a "bonus" based on the number of sorties flown. U.S. sources say Laotian pilots get \$1 per sortie and that the payment produces frequent "dumping" only minutes from their bases at Luang Prabang and Long Cheng during routine missions.

Part of the rising American investment in bombing ordnance is attributed by a knowledgeable source to the dumping, though the bulk of the rise is in cost alone. Dated bomb stocks now have been expended, thus requiring purchase of new ordnance at prevailing prices.

Although there may be more frequent success in actually bombing the enemy by using guides, observers here fear that their existence will mean that bombing is more controlled in general targeting. Extensive use of non-Laotians is also

9 AUG 1971

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CIA Establishes Precedent with Laos War Disclosures

STATOTHR

BY FRANK STARR
Washington Bureau Chief
(Chicago Tribune Press Service)

WASHINGTON, Aug. 8 — A significant precedent in government secrecy was established last week when the Central Intelligence Agency, with White House approval, conceded for the first time its hitherto top secret role as the clandestine director of the United States war effort in Laos.

Administration sources say the rather startling public confirmation of what had long been charged or assumed constituted a deliberate decision to concede such a fact in favor of protecting other secrets less generally assumed.

But the sources attribute the decision largely to the pressure created by accurate and competent investigation by two former foreign service officers now working for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the strength their material lent to the legislators in their confrontation with the Executive Branch.

How Times Change

"Times have changed," said one administration source who recalled how President Kennedy had protected from public exposure the CIA role in the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion by taking the blame for it himself.

Two years ago the administration was not mentioning American involvement in Laos, another source noted, while now as much as 50 per cent of the U. S. role there is a matter of public record.

Most of it became public last week after five weeks of negotiations between the two investigators and representatives of the Defense and State Departments and the CIA who were faced with what is readily admitted to be an extensive, detailed and accurate account of

News Analysis

the U. S. role in Laos and the possibility of an extended and bitter debate over its secrecy if much of it weren't disclosed.

Object of Bargaining

The object of the bargaining was what would or would not be censored in a 23-page staff report entitled "Laos: April 1971" written by James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose as a result of 12 days spent in Laos at the end of April and the beginning of May.

"They are competent investigators and they knew the right questions to ask because they know where the bodies are buried," one well-placed source said.

Lowenstein was a foreign service officer in the State Department from 1956 to 1965, as was Moose from 1957 to 1966. Moose additionally worked as a special assistant of former Presidential adviser Walt Rostow, then in the Defense Department's Institute of Defense analysis, and finally during the first year of the Nixon administration as a staff secretary on the National Security Council under Presidential adviser Henry Kissinger.

Had Full Authority

On the other hand, as Lowenstein readily admits, much of the top secret information was given them in the first place with the full authority of

the Executive Branch in the persons of embassy sources in Laos who, when asked for the secret data, gave it.

To that degree and to the degree that the final decision to release as much as was released, including the CIA's involvement, were approved by President Nixon, the disclosures do represent the effect of Nixon's announced policy of making more information available to the public.

But there is a strong belief on both the Executive and Legislative sides of the argument that the administration was faced with the possibility of a strong challenge to the conduct of a secret war in Laos as opposed to a nonsecret one, and possibly over the larger issue of secrecy itself in the wake of the Pentagon papers.

In any case, the CIA, State, and Defense Department representatives finally conceded the CIA role in Laos, the extent of the CIA-backed army of Laotian irregulars, the extent of the air war, and the extent of U. S. expenditures on the total effort in Laos.

There were many facts, Lowenstein said, which both sides agreed were and should remain secret for obvious reasons, and the first of the five weeks was spent narrowing down to four or five the areas on which Lowenstein and Moose held out for publication. The administration representatives then needed to start the process

of gaining approval of higher authority.

Much finally was censored, particularly on the subject of U. S. support of Thai irregulars fighting with CIA support and training among the force of 30,000 Laotian irregulars.

But among the information not censored were the reasons for secrecy given the two investigators during their 12-day visit to Indochina.

"The principal arguments we heard for the need to continue to maintain secrecy were these: first, that Gen. Vang Pao [commander of the irregular forces] does not want to allow the press to visit because his military security would be compromised; second, that if reporters were permitted to visit Long Tieng [the irregulars' principal base], they would concentrate on the role of the U. S. overlooking Vang Pao's contribution; third, that the CIA is a clandestine organization not used to operating in the open and that its operations in other parts of the world might be compromised if the techniques and individuals involved in Laos were to become known; fourth, that were U. S. activities publicized, American would be accused of violating the Geneva Agreements of 1962, and it would thus be more difficult to reestablish the Geneva Agreements as a framework for a future settlement in Laos; and fifth, that the details of the Thai presence would become known which would [deleted]."

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Secrecy On Laos Being Lifted

By WILLIAM K. WYANT JR.
A Washington Correspondent
of the Post-Dispatch

WASHINGTON, Aug. 7

MANY AMERICANS do not know where Laos is, much less that the United States is spending close to \$500,000,000 annually in support of the clandestine war there. Like a dentist digging at a wisdom tooth, Senator Stuart Symington (Dem.), Missouri, has been trying to bring the facts to light.

The cat was pretty well out of the bag this week—not fully, but the head and shoulders at least—with the publication of two documents in which the Executive Branch allowed mention of the Central Intelligence Agency's heavy involvement in Laos.

One of the documents was a 23-page report prepared for Symington's foreign relations subcommittee on United States security agreements and commitments abroad. It was prepared by two staff members, James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose. A "sanitized" version of it was made public Tuesday.

The other document was the expurgated, declassified transcript of the Senate's closed session of June 7, a session that had been requested by Symington to discuss Laos and make the then top-secret Lowenstein-Moose report available to other Senators. It was published Wednesday in the Congressional record.

Lowenstein and Moose visited Laos from April 21 to May 4, in the aftermath of last spring's drive into Laos by United States-supported South Vietnamese troops. The two presented their report, classified top secret, to Symington's panel May 21.

BEFORE THE REPORT was made public this week, it was reviewed in detail with representatives of departments of State and Defense and the CIA. This procedure took five weeks. Many deletions were made for security reasons, but the CIA permitted itself to be mentioned. The CIA's role—long reported—now is official.

Late in 1969 Symington's subcommittee held hearings on Laos as part of a comprehensive inquiry on American commitments abroad. A heavily censored report of the hearings was made public in April 1970. One can scrutinize its 603 pages without finding mention of the CIA.

In contrast, the Lowenstein-Moose report released this week puts the CIA firmly in the picture, as in the sentence: "The United States continues to train, arm, and feed the Lao army and air force and to train, advise, pay, support and, to a great extent, organize the irregular military forces under the direction of the CIA."

IN ASSESSING the new report on Laos, it is necessary to differentiate between what it contained that was news to the Senate and Congress generally and what it contained that was news to the American public: Members of Congress are often privy to information that is classified and not available to the citizenry.

As Symington acted in a statement Tuesday, there were several areas in which the subcommittee and its staff report squeezed information from the Executive Branch that previously had been kept secret.

(1) Since early 1970, the United States has been conducting B-52 raids in northern Laos on a regular basis. This was disclosed to Congress May 3 while the staff men were in Laos. President Richard M. Nixon admitted in March 1970 that the United States was flying tactical missions in northern Laos.

It is easy to relate American air activity against the Ho Chi Minh Trail in southern Laos to the war in Vietnam, because the trail is an enemy supply route to South Vietnam. In the case of the war in northern Laos, the relationship to Vietnam is less obvious.

(2) The American-supported irregular forces in Laos, about 30,000 Laotian troops and about 4000 Thais, are deployed generally throughout the country's military regions, except around the capital, Vientiane. It had been thought that the irregular forces were concentrated in Military Region II under Gen. Vang Pao.

(3) United States operations in Laos are costing much more than had been supposed. Symington said the only official expenditure publicly announced previously for Laos for fiscal 1971, just ended, was about \$50,000,000 in economic assistance. He said the actual outlay for 1971, exclusive of bombing costs, was about \$350,000,000.

In addition the report by Lowenstein and Moose indicated an over-all intensity of American involvement in Laos that undoubtedly came as a surprise to many in Congress and to citizens at large, even the sophisticated.

The figures that were made public did not include specific outlays by the CIA. Those figures were deleted. It could be deduced, however, that the CIA spent \$100,000,000 to \$120,000,000 in 1971 for support of the irregulars, including the recruits from Thailand.

IN ADDITION to training, paying and otherwise supporting the CIA's irregulars, the United States trains, arms and feeds the Royal Laotian Army and Air Force. It was made clear that the government of Laos had about exhausted its manpower from internal sources—hence, the troops from Thailand.

The irregular forces in Laos are doing most of the fighting against enemy Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese units. From 1968 through last April, 9920 irregulars were killed in action and 3334 royal army troops.

A private in the royal army receives the equivalent of \$5 a month, in addition to allowances for dependents. Lowenstein and Moose were told that the Laotian government was having difficulty finding soldiers. About 30 per cent of new recruits reportedly desert.

The population of Laos, an impoverished agricultural country west of Vietnam and south of China, is only 2,800,000. Nearly two thirds of Laos is not under government control. The military situation has steadily worsened.

The income of the approximately 2,000,000 Laos under government control averages \$68 a year, based on the country's gross national product. A partial total of United States outlays for Laos in 1971, it was said, would amount to \$141 for each Laotian.

A BONE of contention between Mr. Nixon's Administration and some members of Congress is whether the United States Government, in its support for the Thai irregulars, violated a law enacted by Congress last year. The Government says it has not.

At the behest of Senator J. William Fulbright (Dem.), Arkansas, an amendment was put into the defense authorization bill barring the use of funds "to support Vietnamese or other free-world forces in actions designed to provide military support and assistance to the governments of Cambodia or Laos."

If defense funds were spent to support the troops from Thailand in Laos, the contravention of Congress's will would be fairly obvious. What about CIA funds? The State Department has taken the position that the Thai irregulars sent into Laos by the United States are "local forces in Laos."

STATOTHR

DES MOINES, IOWA
REGISTER

H - 250,261

S - 515,710

AUG 6 1971

Secret War Exposed

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has prided additional details about the secret war in Laos from a reluctant Administration, which finally permitted publication of a censored version of a committee staff report by investigators James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose.

It turns out that the secret army organized and trained by the United States Central Intelligence Agency has largely taken over the fighting from the Royal Laotian Army, not just in the Plain of Jars but in all but one of the five military regions of Laos.

For years the Administration has been repeating, "The United States has no ground combat forces in Laos." During the joint U.S.-South Vietnamese armed incursion into Laos early this year, President Nixon added, "We are not going to use ground forces in Laos. We are not going to use advisers in Laos with the South Vietnamese forces."

These statements were true in the sense that the CIA force, though trained and financed and advised by Americans, did not consist of Americans. The secret soldiers were alleged to be part of the Laotian armed forces, not the American or South Vietnamese.

In President Nixon's statement Mar. 6, 1970 on the scope of U.S. involvement in Laos he admitted "a military assistance program reaching back over six years and air operations dating over four years" and also "some other military support activities which had been initiated by two previous Administrations." He said he thought disclosure of more about those "other activities" would not be in the national interest.

They leaked out in dribbles anyway, and now with the publication of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff report, still more has become public.

Do they violate the law?

Congress attempted in 1969 and 1970 to put limits on U.S. combat activity in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia, without crippling the air attacks on the Ho Chi

The Church-Cooper-Mansfield amendment to the defense appropriations act for fiscal year 1970 said no funds could be used to finance "the introduction of American ground combat troops into Laos or Thailand." Fiscal year 1970 is long over, but the Administration is reluctant to go against this provision openly, and it has kept U.S. Army ground forces out of combat in those countries.

The Cooper-Church amendment to the supplemental foreign aid authorization bill for fiscal year 1971 which ended June 30, prohibited use of U.S. ground combat troops or advisers in Cambodia. U.S. advisers have trained Cambodians, but the training was done in South Vietnam, so this was not a violation.

* * *

But President Nixon, like Presidents Johnson and Kennedy before him, has usurped the constitutional power of Congress to "raise and support armies," and declare war.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee leaders believe that use of Thai soldiers in Laos violates the Fulbright amendment banning U.S. support of mercenaries in Laos, but the Administration now counters that these are ethnic Thais recruited and trained in Laos.

This seems unlikely. It could be a cover story cooked up to protect Thailand, which hates publicity about its military ties with the United States. It may have to get along with North Vietnam soon instead of fighting it.

But aren't these "ethnic Thais" still mercenaries, even if the story is true? And aren't the soldiers in the secret army of Meo tribesmen and other Laotians trained and paid by the American CIA also mercenaries?

Gradually, the secret war in Laos is becoming known to Americans, and it doesn't look good.

It isn't even working militarily. Hostile forces control more of Laos than ever. The Royal Laotian army never would fight, and the secret CIA-trained

BALTIMORE SUN
4 AUG 1971

The CIA in Laos

The United States government has been struggling with the war in Laos through four presidential administrations. The American involvement began there during the Eisenhower administration; it was at a near-crisis stage when President Eisenhower passed it on to President Kennedy and in subsequent years it was merged into the United States larger involvement in South Vietnam. For reasons going back to the Geneva Accords, much of the United States participation in Laos has been secret—or at least semi-secret—but largely through the persistence of Senator Symington the record of clandestine financing of military operations by the CIA has been pieced together. Now a staff report by a Senate subcommittee has been issued after being subjected to censorship by the State and Defense departments and the CIA.

During the 1972 fiscal year the cost of United States military and economic aid to Laos, plus the special operations financed by the CIA, is put at \$374 million. Reporters concluded from the figures in the report, and the omissions, that the CIA spent more than \$100 million last year in Laos, using irregular Lao forces and a contingent of mercenaries from Thailand. The irregular forces were reported to be made up of some 30,000 indigenous troops, including a large contingent of Meo tribesmen, and Thai mercenaries. The report found that in the conduct of the war "the

Royal Lao government continues to be almost totally dependent on the United States, perhaps more dependent on us than any other government in the world."

"Most observers in Laos say that from the military point of view the situation there is growing steadily worse, and the initiative seems clearly to be in the hands of the enemy," the report said further. And: "No one we met in Laos, American or Lao, seems to have a prescription for the future other than to continue to do what is being done now."

It is hoped that if and when the war in South Vietnam is ended—that is, ended by a peace settlement and not merely ended so far as United States combat forces are concerned—the war in Laos also can be ended. The record in Laos and the present course of events add greatly to the reason for a settlement in Vietnam.

STATOHR

CLEVELAND, OHIO
PLAIN DEALER

M - 409,414
S - 545,032

AUG 4 1971

True—and Shocking—Laos Story

It's official. The news so far about United States involvement in Laos is bad. It is bad enough that what remains to be disclosed cannot cause much more shock to the American people.

United States involvement in Laos, and military involvement in particular, has been an open secret for years, but until now it has been impossible to gauge its true depth.

As recently as Feb. 11, at the time of the Laos incursion by South Vietnamese troops, the Nixon administration continued a tradition of misleading the American people in the matter of American participation in Laotian affairs. It repeated a statement made by the President a year earlier: "The total number of Americans directly employed by the U.S. government in Laos is 616. Another 424 Americans are employed on contract to the government or to government contractors. Of these, 1,040 Americans, the total number, military and civilian, engaged in a military advisory or military training capacity numbers 320. Logistics personnel number 323."

What a good many of those small numbers of Americans have been mixed up in amounts to plenty. That is confirmed, finally, in the staff report this week from the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on foreign commitments. These disclosures should cause further concern over how deeply the United States is entangled in an Indochina mess:

• The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) maintains a 30,000-man force of irregulars now fighting in Laos. Not only

that, the CIA recruits and pays for "volunteers" from Thailand added to the irregular force and the Royal Laotian Army.

• The big-money cost of involment increases. In the fiscal year ended last month it was \$284.2 million, most of it for military aid. In the current fiscal year it is expected to total \$374 million. And those figures do not include the cost of American bombing operations against the Ho Chi Minh supply line and in support of Laotian forces fighting Communist aggression.

• Despite the massive American assistance to Laos, the outlook there is poor. Communist forces are building a road in northern Laos that in effect shifts Red China's border southward. The report says: "Most observers in Laos say that from the military point of view the situation there is growing steadily worse and the initiative seems clearly to be in the hands of the enemy."

The report does not tell the whole story of American involvement in Laos. Sen. Stuart Symington, D-Mo., the Armed Services subcommittee chairman, complains that the Nixon administration still refuses to make public facts concerning the nature, composition and command arrangements of the CIA-sponsored Thai forces in Laos.

But as Symington says, the curtain of secrecy has been partially lifted.

What is disclosed so far makes more valid the fears of harmful consequences from military activities carried out in a clandestine manner. More of the Laos story needs to be told.

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M - 237,967
S - 566,377

Huge China air defense found on Laos border

By Darius S. Jhabvala
Globe Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON—
Communist China has substantially increased its air defense capabilities along a road they have been building in northern Laos, making that region "one of the most heavily defended in

In the past two years Red China not only increased its forces along the road by more than 100 percent but also has deployed 395 radar-directed, anti-aircraft weapons which are effective up to 68,000 feet. The weapons are manned by crews totaling anywhere from 3000 to 7000 trained personnel.

Also along the road, which begins at the Laotian border with the Chinese province of Yunnan and runs up to Munong Huon, are eight small-arms firing ranges of the kind normally associated with garrisons of ground troops. There also are headquarters buildings and 66 basketball courts.

These details were revealed in a staff report on Laos prepared for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee by two investigators, James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Mocse, who visited the strife-worn country from April 22 to May 4.

The document has been heavily censored by officials of the State and Defense departments and the Central Intelligence Agency for reasons of national security.

Thus, most of what has now been declassified and issued has been in the public domain since the committee began its investigation of the US involvements in Laos.

Nevertheless, a spokesman for the committee explained that, despite the deletions, the report "will help the American public decide whether it is either the United States to continue to do what it has been wise or desirable for the doing in Laos at an ever-increasing cost to this nation in dollars and to the Lao people in lives and territory."

The report states that "most observers" in Laos hold the opinion that "from the military point of view the situation there is growing steadily worse and the initiative clearly seems to be in the hands of the enemy."

"There are apparently no plans for retaking and holding any of the two-thirds of the country no longer under government control but only a hope, not too firmly held in some quarters, that the one-third of Lao territory now under government control can continue to be held," it points out.

The war, the investigators claim, "is run in most respects by the US Embassy in Vientiane," and the undertaking "seems to consume a considerable portion of the time of senior officers."

They also reveal that the United States "continues to train, arm and feed the Lao army and air force and to train, advise, pay and support and, to a great extent, organize the key regular forces under the direction of the CIA."

Members of the Foreign Relations Committee, delat-

bly Sen. Clifford P. Case (R-N.J.), and Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), have claimed that some 4800 Thai mercenaries are now operating in Laos. The mercenaries are part of the Battalions Guerriers which, according to one estimate, "have become the cutting edge of the Lao military forces."

No details were made public about the strength of the BG and where and how they operate. However, the report claims that the CIA supervises and pays for their training and provides their salary, allowances and operational costs.

According to the report the partial total of estimated US expenditures in Laos in fiscal 1971 was \$284.2 million, including an estimated \$162.2 million in military assistance and \$52 million in aid programs.

While the figure for what the CIA spends has not been revealed it can be deduced that at least \$70 million was spent, exclu-

sive of the Thai irregular costs.

The last amount is almost twice the amount of the Laotian government's entire budget for the current year.

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China Doubles Troops on Border

Military Setback in Laos Grows Steadily Worse

By RAY MOSELEY

Bulletin Washington Bureau

Washington — Despite the American-backed invasion of Laos earlier this year, enemy forces still hold the initiative and the military situation is growing steadily worse, according to a report issued yesterday by a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee.

The heavily censored version of the 23-page report — written by staff members James O. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose, former Foreign Service officers who visited Laos in April — also contained these statements:

The enemy holds more Laos territory than it did before the invasion by South Vietnamese troops and now controls two-thirds of the country.

The invasion and heavy air attacks on the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos have not prevented the enemy from continuing to move enough supplies through Laos to support its military operations in South Vietnam and Cambodia.

The Central Intelligence Agency is maintaining a 30,000-man "irregular" force now fighting throughout Laos.

China Doubles Troops

And Communist China, which has been building a road across northern Laos for some time, has doubled the number of troops involved in that operation and built up air defense along the road. The practical effect of the road has been to extend Communist China's border south to encompass "a substantial portion of northern Laos."

Some material was deleted

at the request of the State and Defense Departments and the Central Intelligence Agency, resulting in such passages as:

"We were told that the embassy wanted to (deleted) the (deleted) with (deleted) because the (deleted) were more mobile and thus "could do things the others could not do."

Lifts Veil of Secrecy

Despite the deletions, Subcommittee Chairman Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) said the report will do much to lift the veil from the "secret war" in Laos for the benefit of the American public.

Laos was proclaimed a neutral nation by the 1952 Geneva conference that ended the first Indochina war. But fighting has gone on there continuously, with North Vietnam never acknowledging its violations of the agreement and the U.S. reluctant to say much about its own role.

Much of the deleted matter in the report referred to Thai "irregular" forces recruited by the U.S. to fight in Laos. The existence of these forces was acknowledged officially

only a few months ago but the U.S. has never given the number of these troops or their costs.

Under 4,000 Troops

However, officials said last week the number was fewer than 4,000. Symington said the Government refused to declassify facts about the Thai troops because of objections from Thailand and Laos.

"But since the taxpayers of this country are paying the bills, why should the recipient foreign governments have the rights to dictate what our citizens can and cannot be told about the way in which public funds are being spent?" he said in a statement.

The report said the Thais were only part of the irregular units in Laos "trained, equipped, supported, advised and to a great extent organized by the CIA."

These irregular units started out as a force of Meo tribesmen under Gen. Vang Pao, known as the "clandestine army" and operating around the strategic Plain of Jars. Now, the report said,

they operate in all sections of Laos, except around Vientiane, the administrative capital, and number about 30,000 men.

The report makes clear the extent to which Laos is an economic dependency of the U.S. The Lao Government budget this year totals \$36.6 million, it says, but U.S. aid programs total \$350 million.

The U.S. has built just under half the Laos road network, 76 percent of elementary classrooms, 100 percent of the teacher training schools and 22 percent of the secondary schools.

On the Chinese road operation, the report said the number of Chinese troops involved has increased from between 6,000 and 8,000 two years ago to between 14,000 and 20,000 today.

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AUG 3 1971

Laos Reported Dependent On U.S.

By WILLIAM K. WYANT JR.

A Washington Correspondent of the Post-Dispatch

WASHINGTON, Aug. 3—The relay government in Laos is almost totally dependent on the United States, and the dependence is increasing as the military situation there worsens, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was told in a report made public today.

Exclusive of bombing costs, the United States spent about \$350,000,000 on its operations in Laos in fiscal 1971, it was said. That was nearly 10 times the total budget of the Laotian government.

The report indicated that the Central Intelligence Agency was maintaining an irregular military force in Laos of about 30,000 men, at a 1971 cost of about \$70,000,000. The cost figure does not include support of irregular troops from Thailand.

The report, originally classified top secret, was prepared by the staff of the Senate foreign relations subcommittee on United States security agreements and commitments abroad. The subcommittee chairman is Senator Stuart Symington (Dem.), Missouri.

Symington requested a closed session of the full Senate, held June 7, to discuss the then-classified report. The version made public today was declassified after five weeks of consultation with the Departments of State and Defense and the CIA.

The Administration of President Richard M. Nixon made numerous security deletions from the published report but allowed mention of the heavy CIA involvement in the clandestine, American-supported war in Laos.

Symington said a declassified version of the closed Senate session on the Laos report was to appear in the Congressional Record tomorrow.

The report mentions a trip to Laos made April 22-May 4 by James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose of the Symington subcommittee staff. The American-supported incursion into Laos by South Vietnamese troops began Feb. 8 and ended April 9.

Lowenstein and Moose were told in Laos, they said, that "from the military point of view, the situation there is growing steadily worse and the initiative seems clearly to be in the hands of the enemy."

Since the South Vietnamese operation into Laos last spring, called Lam Son 719, it was reported, additional territory in Laos has come under enemy control. North Vietnam

has about three more regiments in southern Laos than it had before the operation.

The report said the war in Laos was run in most respects by the United States Embassy at Vientiane, the capital of Laos. It said American officials at the embassy spent an hour and a half a day at an operations meeting, during which they are briefed on the war by Army and air attaches and the CIA station chief.

"The United States continues to train, arm and feed the Lao army and air force and to train, advise, pay, support, and, to a great extent, organize the irregular military forces under the direction of the CIA," Lowenstein and Moose said.

Combat elements of the irregular forces are now about as large as those of the Royal Lao Army, it was said. Cost of the irregulars has been increasing every year, the report noted, and the irregulars "have become the cutting edge of the military, leaving the Royal Lao Army as a force primarily devoted to static defense."

Moose and Lowenstein were not permitted to say how many irregular volunteers from Thailand were in Laos at the time of their visit. They were told the Thai volunteers were recruited for service in Laos from outside the regular Thai army. The costs of the Thai troops are channeled through the CIA, it was said.

The report said two Laotian air force planes in January 1970 bombed the road being built in Northern Laos by Communist China. Subsequently, it was reported, there has been a heavy build-up of Chinese antiaircraft along the road. The area is off limits to United States aircraft.

Symington has sought for some time to bring into public view the facts about American involvement in Laos, an elongated country of about 3,000,000 persons west of Vietnam, south of China, and north of Cambodia. The Ho Chi Minh Trail into Vietnam runs through Laos.

It is encouraging, Symington said in a statement today, that the American Government has agreed now that much of what it has been doing in Laos may be made public. He said he regretted that some details and facts still were being withheld.

"Let us hope that . . . the staff report on Laos will help the American public decide," he said, "whether it is either wise or desirable for the United States to continue to do what we have been doing in Laos, at ever-increasing cost to this nation in dollars, and to the Lao people in lives and territory."

16 JUN 1971

STATOTHR STATOTHR

U.S. uses Thai troops in Laos

By Richard E. Ward

Second of two articles

A rare secret session of the Senate was held at the request of Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) June 7 to hear a report on U.S. clandestine activities in Laos. Following the session, Senators Symington and J.W. Fulbright (D-Ark.) openly charged that the use of Thai mercenaries, just admitted that same day by the State Department which calls them "volunteers," was violating congressional restrictions on U.S. operations in Laos.

Some details of the nearly 3½-hour closed door meeting were given in the June 8 Washington Post in an article by Spencer Rich who reported:

—Symington, who revealed that the administration wants \$374 million for military and economic programs in Laos for the 1972 fiscal year (a figure which does not include the \$2 billion estimated costs of bombing), said that he wanted the Senate to know the details of "the secret war" before appropriating funds for it.

—Of the request, \$120 million is said to be earmarked for funding CIA operations in Northern Laos, including the use of Meo mercenaries from Laos as well as at least 4800 Thai troops.

—A major issue in the secret debate centered upon whether the use of Thai forces was in contravention of the 1970 Fulbright amendment to the 1971 Defense Appropriations Act, signed into law by President Nixon Jan. 11 this year. The amendment barred use of Defense Department funds to support what the Pentagon calls "free world forces" in actions "designed to provide military support and assistance to the government of Cambodia or Laos."

—The massive bombing of Northern Laos, which has nothing to do with the movement of supplies from North Vietnam to the South or Cambodia, was questioned by several senators, including Fulbright and Clifford P. Case (R-N.J.).

Nixon the lawbreaker

After the Senate meeting, Rich reported that Symington stated: "My personal opinion is...that the law has been contravened. The amendment said you couldn't spend money to train and put people of foreign governments into Laos or into Cambodia." That was also Fulbright's view. State Department sources later said, according to Rich, "that the Thais being used aren't recruited on a government-to-government basis, but were individuals recruited from the borderside Thai population."

The Post report obviously left out many details of the Senate discussion, assuming the legislative body got a full account of U.S. activities. Symington's disclosures were based on a report by two staff members of his subcommittee of the Foreign Relations committee, James Lowenstein and Richard Morse, who had recently made an inquiry into Laos.

Reportedly the Symington subcommittee now has a relatively accurate account of U.S. activities in Laos that is more complete than was provided by the administration at secret hearings in October 1969, released after "security" deletions by the administration in April 1970. What might be called the battle of Laos in Washington, concerns the attempt by antiwar senators to get U.S. activities in Laos itself into the public record. Initially and perhaps still, some senators have been reacting against the administration's deception of themselves along with the public. However, the issue of Laos is now being put forward to oppose administration policy in Indochina as a whole because it so clearly reveals the White House aim of maintaining—if not expanding—the war. This point remains clouded during discussions focusing on Vietnam because troop withdrawals are still used by the supporters of U.S. aggression to obscure the actual aims of U.S. policy.

As has been previously noted by the Symington subcommittee, the lid of U.S. official secrecy conceals little that is not known by informed journalists or "the other side." Certainly the Pathet Lao knows what is happening in Laos. They are obviously fully aware of the bombings by the Air Force as well as the array of CIA programs. Although no reliable figure had been released on U.S. spending on its Laotian programs, the Pathet Lao accurately estimated it last summer as greater than \$300 million (again apart from bombing).

Number of Thai troops growing

Concerning the use of Thai troops, the Pathet Lao stated last year that they numbered about 1000 during the Johnson administration (a figure that has recently been corroborated in the press and by Sen. Fulbright) and that the increase in Thai forces was undertaken by Nixon. However, according to the Pathet Lao, the number of Thai troops now exceeds the 4800 figure used by Fulbright.

In April of this year, Prince Souphanouvong, head of the Lao Patriotic Front (Pathet Lao), charged that the number of Thai troops was being augmented by the U.S. Shortly after this, George W. Ashworth reported in the April 17 Christian Science Monitor: "Nixon administration officials have hammered out an agreement with the government of Thailand for sharply increased use of Thai forces in Laos."

Thai troops were previously used in the ill-fated U.S.-backed attempt to hold the Plain of Jars, which ended in an important Pathet Lao victory in February 1970. Presumably the losses then were an element leading to the more formalized agreement for use of Thai troops. Bangkok may relinquish some of its sovereignty to Washington, but not without a price.

Thai "volunteer" troops used in South Vietnam were given a bonus by the U.S. considerably augmenting their regular pay while Bangkok received military hardware and other considerations from the Johnson administration to agree to use of Thais in Vietnam. There is no reason to assume that Bangkok's price has gone down, more likely it is up. Confirming this, a Senate source has noted that the cost of the mercenaries was high. Symington on June 7 referred to both regular and irregular Thai troops being used in Laos, so it is possible that part of the deal with Bangkok involves freedom for the CIA to recruit directly in Thailand. Taking all evidence into account, Thai troops in Laos may now number 10,000 or higher.

Senators Symington and Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) attacked administration activities in Laos in statements issued a day before the secret debate. Symington emphasized the administration furtiveness while Kennedy charged that U.S. military activities in Northern Laos lacked constitutional authority, which seemed to be implicitly saying that the U.S. was conducting a war against the Laotian people without a declaration of war or congressional authority.

Wide destruction

Among the facts to emerge from the recent congressional debate is the acceleration of U.S. bombing in Laos, or rather, of the liberated zone since the autumn of last year, and the increased use of B-52s, a plane whose bombing reaches the peak of indiscriminate destructiveness. The step-up in B-52 activity in Laos has largely coincided with the accelerated "protective reaction strikes" being carried out against North Vietnam, and it is quite possible that one of the real purposes of these attacks is an effort to prevent the DRV from utilizing its potent aerial defenses to assist their Laotian neighbors.

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On Credibility Gaps

WEEK BY WEEK, it is being increasingly said that President Nixon is suffering from a "credibility gap." This silly but fashionable phrase is meant to imply that nobody believes the President, because he does not tell the country the truth.

It would be ludicrous to deny that the President does not exercise the politician's privilege of being ready-mouthed about some things that could be stated far more starkly. But it really is time to point out that the President has usually been decidedly forthright and accurate about great matters.

Or at least he has been rather more accurate than the people in politics, in the media, and even within the government, who go on and on about this "credibility gap." To begin with the government itself, some very strange results have been produced in these last years by bureaucratic rivalries, by ideological slants, and above all, by the desire of a good many permanent officials to follow the currently fashionable herd.

IN TANGIBLE TERMS, these results have mainly taken the form of grossly misleading estimates of problems of very great importance. The fact-gathering apparatus is not at fault. The problem lies in what is done with the facts, once they are gathered.

Thus from 1966 to 1969, it was officially estimated that the Vietcong were able to deploy no less than 300,000 guerrillas of one sort or another. A misuse of facts produced this figure.

Then more facts, too strong to ignore, caused the figure to implode, as it were. In one swift shrinkage, it was reduced to an outside total of 60,000 Vietcong guerrillas. An admitted error by a factor of five is rather considerable, one must add.

Yet it is hardly more considerable than the equally important error that was made about Cambodia's enormous logistical importance to Hanoi—which was only revealed by the President's Cambodian venture. And no one has heard of Cambodian rain dances about these well known governmental errors precisely because

they were errors on the currently modish side!

IF YOU TURN to the politicians, you find another interesting study in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's inquiry into the American activities in Laos. The inquiry produced great "revelations" of subsidized Meo guerrillas, of Americans out of uniform who aid the Laotian people to defend their country, and of other wicked activities.

There are two things to be said about these "revelations." Sen. Stuart Symington of Missouri and of the Foreign Relations Committee has been a member of the watchdog committee of the Central Intelligence Agency for a very long time. All the facts "revealed" by his committee's inquiry had either been known to Sen. Symington, or had been very easily accessible to him, long before the so-called "revelations" began.

By the same token, all the facts of any significance were equally well known to scores of newspapermen, both in the field and here in Washington. It may have been desirable to place the facts before a larger public. But it was a perfect conspiracy of hypocrisy to pretend that the U.S. government's activities in Laos had been successfully and purposely concealed from anyone, including newspapermen.

If one must be bluntly honest about it, moreover, there is another conspiracy of hypocrisy about the record of the media in recent years, on certain very critical occasions. It has already been pointed out in this space that both the Tet offensive and the President's Cambodian venture were grossly misrepresented when these two great events were covering the front pages.

SOME OF THE chief culprits have admitted in print—but hardly on the front pages—that Tet was in fact a perfect disaster for Hanoi, instead of the precise opposite as first reported. It has been admitted, too, that the Cambodian venture has just about ended the war in the lower half of South Vietnam. But no one has boldly admitted that, in consequence, the President's decision at least deserve qualification.

The thing does not end there, either. One of the major news agencies has rather flatly predicted the imminent fall of Phnom Penh so often that this reporter has lost count. At least four times, these wholly erroneous predictions have again covered the front pages. But no one, so far as is known, has even murmured, "So sorry!"

As to the television coverage of the Laos campaign, if the Battle of the Bulge had been similarly covered by television, the natural tendency would have been to ask Adolf Hitler for the best terms he was willing to offer. So the question arises, just what is credibility, and who has a gap?

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